

From: Ricker, Monique T. EOP/USTR Monique_T_Ricker@ustr.eop.gov 
Subject: RE: FOIA Request (USTR-19-0567)
Date: May 29, 2019 at 11:35 AM
To: American Oversight FOIA foia@americanoversight.org
Cc: FN-USTR-FOIA FN-USTR-FOIA@ustr.eop.gov



Mr. McGrath,

This email is the final response of the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) No. FY19-90 submitted on May 1, 2019 requesting "all WhatsApp messages sent or received between USTR Robert Lighthizer and White House Adviser Jared Kushner."

White House Information Technology (WHIT) does not support the WhatsApp, so no WHIT-issued phone has the WhatsApp. This includes phones issued to political appointees such as Ambassador Lighthizer, career employees, detailees, contractors, and interns. The FOIA Office also confirmed with the Ambassador that he does not have the WhatsApp on his personal phone. Therefore, USTR has no records responsive to your request.

This constitutes a complete response to your request. You may contact me or my colleague Melissa Keppel at FOIA@ustr.eop.gov or 202-395-3419 for further assistance and to discuss any aspect of your request. Additionally, you may contact the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS) at the National Archives and Records Administration to inquire about the FOIA mediation services they offer. The contact information for OGIS is as follows: Office of Government Information Services, National Archives and Records Administration, 8601 Adelphi Road-OGIS, College Park, Maryland 20740-6001, e-mail at ogis@nara.gov; telephone at 202-741-5770; toll free at 1-877-684-6448; or facsimile at 202-741-5769.

If you are not satisfied with the response to this request, you may also administratively appeal by writing to: FOIA Office, ATTN: Janice Kaye, Office of the US Trade Representative, Anacostia Naval Annex, Bldg. 410/Door 123, 250 Murray Lane, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20509.

Your appeal must be postmarked or electronically transmitted within 90 days of the date of the response to your request. Both the letter and the envelope should be clearly marked: "Freedom of Information Act Appeal" and should include a reference to the FOIA Case File number listed above. Heightened security in force may delay mail delivery; therefore we suggest that you also email any such appeal to foia@ustr.eop.gov.

In the event you are dissatisfied with the results of any such appeal, judicial review will thereafter be available to you in the United States District Court for the judicial district in which you reside or have your principal place of business, or in the District of Columbia, where we searched for the records you requested.

Thank you,
Monique

Monique T. Ricker
FOIA Program Manager/Attorney

FOIA Program Manager/Attorney

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES TRADE REPRESENTATIVE
WASHINGTON DC 20508

From: American Oversight FOIA <foia@americanoversight.org>
Sent: Wednesday, May 1, 2019 2:59 PM
To: FN-USTR-FOIA <FN-USTR-FOIA@ustr.eop.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] FOIA Request (USTR-19-0567)

Dear FOIA Officer:

Please find attached and pasted below a request for records under the Freedom of Information Act.

Sincerely,

Clay M. Goode
Paralegal
American Oversight
foia@americanoversight.org
>www.americanoversight.org< | @weareoversight

FOIA: USTR-19-0567

May 1, 2019

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

USTR FOIA Office, GSD/RDF

Attn: Chief FOIA Officer Janice Kaye

Office of the U.S. Trade Representative

Anacostia Naval Annex, Building 410/Door 123,

250 Murray Lane SW

Washington, DC 20509

FOIA@ustr.eop.gov

Re: Freedom of Information Act Request

Dear Freedom of Information Officer:

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. § 552, and your agency's implementing regulations, American Oversight makes the following request for records.

In March 2019, Chairman Cummings of the House Oversight Committee sent a letter to the White House Counsel detailing White House Adviser Jared Kushner's use of private email and messaging applications—specifically WhatsApp—in conducting official business, including in communications with foreign leaders.^[1] In light of Mr. Kushner's extensive influence^[2] over a wide range of policies across the Trump administration and his involvement in a wide variety of government initiatives—from sensitive diplomacy to veterans affairs to criminal justice reform—

American Oversight seeks records with the potential to shed light on Mr. Kushner's influence on federal policy and high-ranking agency officials. Public reports demonstrate that some of Mr. Kushner's communications regarding federal government business with these officials are likely sent through the WhatsApp messaging application.

Furthermore, press reporting suggests U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and Kushner have a close working and personal relationship. During a press conference related to trade negotiations with Mexico, Lighthizer stated, “[f]irst, the president’s key advisor and my good friend Jared Kushner was my partner in leading the U.S. negotiating team...I’ve said before and I’ll say again, this agreement would not have happened if it wasn’t for Jared.”^[3] Additionally, publicly released USTR calendars support this reporting of their close working relationship: in 2018 and two months of 2019, Lighthizer and Kushner appear to have held approximately 16 meetings.^[4]

American Oversight seeks records to shed light on whether and to what extent Kushner is participating in USTR policy matters and to what extent he has done so using private messaging platforms.

Requested Records

American Oversight requests that USTR produce the following records within twenty business days:

All WhatsApp messages sent or received between (1) U.S. Trade Representative Robert E. Lighthizer and (2) White House adviser Jared Kushner. Screenshots or other copies of WhatsApp messages with Mr. Kushner are responsive to this request.

Given the reports establishing both that Mr. Kushner regularly uses WhatsApp messages for communications regarding official government business and Mr. Kushner's relationship with the relevant agency officials, the agency must conduct an adequate search for responsive WhatsApp messages "reasonably calculated to uncover all relevant documents." *Valencia-Lucena v. U.S. Coast Guard*, 180 F.3d 321, 325 (D.C. Cir. 1999) (citations omitted). An adequate search will likely require asking officials with knowledge to aid in identifying responsive records. Although many agencies have policies requiring that official text messages copy an agency employee's email address, an electronic search of email records would not be a sufficient search for this request because WhatsApp messaging applications do not have the technological capability to permit copying or forwarding to an email address.

Please provide all responsive records from January 20, 2017, through the date the search is conducted.

American Oversight seeks all responsive records regardless of format, medium, or physical characteristics. In conducting your search, please understand the terms "record," "document," and "information" in their broadest sense, to include any written, typed, recorded, graphic, printed, or audio material of any kind. We seek records of any kind, including electronic records, audiotapes, videotapes, and photographs, as well as letters, emails, facsimiles, telephone messages, voice mail messages and transcripts, notes, or minutes of any meetings, telephone conversations or discussions. Our request includes any attachments to these records. **No category of material should be omitted from search, collection, and production.**

Please search all records regarding agency business. **You may not exclude searches of files or emails in the personal custody of your officials, such as personal email accounts.** Records of official business conducted using unofficial systems or stored outside of official files are subject to the Federal Records Act and FOIA.^[5] **It is not adequate to rely on policies and procedures that require officials to move such information to official systems within a certain period of time; American Oversight has a right to records contained in those files even if material has not yet been moved to official systems or if officials have, through negligence or willfulness, failed to meet their obligations.**^[6]

In addition, please note that in conducting a "reasonable search" as required by law, you

in addition, please note that in conducting a “reasonable search” as required by law, you must employ the most up-to-date technologies and tools available, in addition to searches by individual custodians likely to have responsive information. Recent technology may have rendered your agency’s prior FOIA practices unreasonable. **In light of the government-wide requirements to manage information electronically by the end of 2016, it is no longer reasonable to rely exclusively on custodian-driven searches.**^[7] Furthermore, **agencies that have adopted the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Capstone program, or similar policies, now maintain emails in a form that is reasonably likely to be more complete than individual custodians’ files.** For example, a custodian may have deleted a responsive email from his or her email program, but your agency’s archiving tools would capture that email under Capstone. Accordingly, American Oversight insists that your agency use the most up-to-date technologies to search for responsive information and take steps to ensure that the most complete repositories of information are searched. American Oversight is available to work with you to craft appropriate search terms. **However, custodian searches are still required; agencies may not have direct access to files stored in .PST files, outside of network drives, in paper format, or in personal email accounts.**

Under the FOIA Improvement Act of 2016, agencies must adopt a presumption of disclosure, withholding information “only if . . . disclosure would harm an interest protected by an exemption” or “disclosure is prohibited by law.”^[8] If it is your position that any portion of the requested records is exempt from disclosure, American Oversight requests that you provide an index of those documents as required under *Vaughn v. Rosen*, 484 F.2d 820 (D.C. Cir. 1973), *cert. denied*, 415 U.S. 977 (1974). As you are aware, a *Vaughn* index must describe each document claimed as exempt with sufficient specificity “to permit a reasoned judgment as to whether the material is actually exempt under FOIA.”^[9] Moreover, the *Vaughn* index “must describe *each* document or portion thereof withheld, and for *each* withholding it must discuss the consequences of disclosing the sought-after information.”^[10] Further, “the withholding agency must supply ‘a relatively detailed justification, specifically identifying the reasons why a particular exemption is relevant and correlating those claims with the particular part of a withheld document to which they apply.’”^[11]

In the event some portions of the requested records are properly exempt from disclosure, please disclose any reasonably segregable non-exempt portions of the requested records. If it is your position that a document contains non-exempt segments, but that those non-exempt segments are so dispersed throughout the document as to make segregation impossible, please state what portion of the document is non-exempt, and how the material is dispersed throughout the document.^[12] Claims of nonsegregability must be made with the same degree of detail as required for claims of exemptions in a *Vaughn* index. If a request is denied in whole, please state specifically that it is not reasonable to segregate portions of the record for release.

To ensure that this request is properly construed, that searches are conducted in an adequate but efficient manner, and that extraneous costs are not incurred, American Oversight welcomes an opportunity to discuss its request with you before you undertake your search or incur search or duplication costs. By working together at the outset, American Oversight hopes to decrease the likelihood of costly and time-consuming litigation in the future.

Where possible, please provide responsive material in electronic format by email or in PDF or TIF format on a USB drive. Please send any responsive material being sent by mail to American Oversight, 1030 15th Street NW, Suite B255, Washington, DC 20005. If it will accelerate release of responsive records to American Oversight, please also provide responsive material on a rolling basis.

Fee Waiver Request

In accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii) and your agency's implementing regulations, American Oversight requests a waiver of fees associated with processing this request for records. The subject of this request concerns the operations of the federal government, and the disclosures will likely contribute to public understanding of those operations. Moreover, the request is primarily and fundamentally for non-commercial purposes.

American Oversight requests a waiver of fees because disclosure of the requested information is in the public interest because it is likely to contribute significantly to public understanding of activities of the government. The disclosure of the information sought under this request will reveal the operations of the federal government, as it directly concerns the communications practices of senior administration officials and the steps taken to ensure compliance with federal records retention law—a matter that President Trump has suggested is extremely important. The requested records would also shed light on the communications of high-ranking government officials charged with executing the trade policy of the United States. The subject of this request is a matter of public interest, and the public's understanding of the government's activities and use of resources would be enhanced through American Oversight's analysis and publication of these records.

This request is primarily and fundamentally not for commercial purposes, but rather the primary interest is in public disclosure of responsive records. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, American Oversight does not have a commercial purpose and the release of the information requested is not in American Oversight's financial interest. American Oversight's mission is to promote transparency in government, to educate the public about government activities, and to ensure the accountability of government officials. American Oversight uses the information gathered, and its analysis of it, to educate the public through reports, press releases, or other media. American Oversight also makes materials it gathers available on its public website and promotes their availability on social media platforms such as Facebook

public website and promotes their availability on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter.^[13] American Oversight has demonstrated its commitment to the public disclosure of documents and creation of editorial content. For example, after receiving records regarding an ethics waiver received by a senior DOJ attorney,^[14] American Oversight promptly posted the records to its website and published an analysis of what the records reflected about DOJ's process for ethics waivers.^[15] As another example, American Oversight has a project called "Audit the Wall," where the organization is gathering and analyzing information and commenting on public releases of information related to the administration's proposed construction of a barrier along the U.S.-Mexico border.^[16]

Accordingly, American Oversight qualifies for a fee waiver.

Conclusion

We share a common mission to promote transparency in government. American Oversight looks forward to working with your agency on this request. If you do not understand any part of this request, have any questions, or foresee any problems in fully releasing the requested records, please contact Dan McGrath at foia@americanoversight.org or 202.897.4213. Also, if American Oversight's request for a fee waiver is not granted in full, please contact us immediately upon making such a determination.

Sincerely,

Austin R. Evers

Executive Director

American Oversight

[1] Letter from Elijah E. Cummings, Chairman of House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Reform to Pat Cipollone, White House Counsel, Mar. 21, 2019, <https://oversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/2019-03-21.EEC%20to%20Cipollone-WH.pdf><; Nicholas Fandos, *Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump Use Private Accounts for Official Business, Their Lawyer Says*, N.Y. TIMES, Mar. 21, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/21/us/politics/jared-kushner-whatsapp.html><.

[2] Jessica Kwong, *Jared Kushner is Growing More Powerful in the White House, Frustrating Trump Aides: Report*, NEWSWEEK (Jan. 17, 2019, 1:00 PM) <https://www.newsweek.com/jared-kushner-growing-more-powerful-white-house-frustrating-trump-aides-1296220><.

[3] Paul Bedard, *Jared Kushner's Personal Touch Sealed US-Mexico-Canada Deal*, WASH. EXAMINER (Oct. 1, 2018, 2:57 PM) <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/washington-secrets/jared-kushners-personal-touch-sealed-us-mexico-canada-deal><.

[4] USTR Calendar 2018, Office of the United States Trade Representative, <https://ustr.gov/about-us/reading-room/freedom-information-act-foia/foia-library/frequently-requested-records><; USTR Calendar 2019 Year-to-Date, Office of the United States Trade Representative, <https://ustr.gov/about-us/reading-room/freedom-information-act-foia/foia-library/frequently-requested-records><

[5] *See Competitive Enter. Inst. v. Office of Sci. & Tech. Policy*, 827 F.3d 145, 149–50 (D.C. Cir. 2016); *cf. Judicial Watch, Inc. v. Kerry*, 844 F.3d 952, 955–56 (D.C. Cir. 2016).

[6] *See Competitive Enter. Inst. v. Office of Sci. & Tech. Policy*, No. 14-cv-765, slip op. at 8 (D.D.C. Dec. 12, 2016) (“The Government argues that because the agency had a policy requiring [the official] to forward all of his emails from his [personal] account to his business email, the [personal] account only contains duplicate agency records at best. Therefore, the Government claims that any hypothetical deletion of the [personal account] emails would still leave a copy of those records intact in [the official’s] work email. However, policies are rarely followed to perfection by anyone. At this stage of the case, the Court cannot assume that each and every work-related email in the [personal] account was duplicated in [the official’s] work email account.” (citations omitted)).

[7] Presidential Memorandum—Managing Government Records, 76 Fed. Reg. 75,423 (Nov. 28, 2011), <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/28/presidential-memorandum-managing-government-records><; Office of Mgmt. & Budget, Exec. Office of the President, Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments & Independent Agencies, “Managing Government Records Directive,” M-12-18 (Aug. 24, 2012), <https://www.archives.gov/files/records-mgmt/m-12-18.pdf><.

[8] FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 § 2 (Pub. L. No. 114–185).

[9] *Founding Church of Scientology v. Bell*, 603 F.2d 945, 949 (D.C. Cir. 1979).

[10] *King v. U.S. Dep't of Justice*, 830 F.2d 210, 223—24 (D.C. Cir. 1987) (emphasis in original).

[11] *Id.* at 224 (citing *Mead Data Central, Inc. v. U.S. Dep't of the Air Force*, 566 F.2d 242, 251 (D.C. Cir. 1977)).

[12] *Mead Data Central*, 566 F.2d at 261.

[13] American Oversight currently has approximately 12,200 page likes on Facebook and 54,100 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, FACEBOOK, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Apr. 30, 2019); American Oversight (@weareoversight), TWITTER, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited Apr. 30, 2019).

[14] *DOJ Records Relating to Solicitor General Noel Francisco's Recusal*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/document/doj-civil-division-response-noel-francisco-compliance>.

[15] *Francisco & the Travel Ban: What We Learned from the DOJ Documents*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/francisco-the-travel-ban-what-we-learned-from-the-doj-documents>.

[16] *Audit the Wall*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/audit-the-wall>.

